## Arkansas School-Age "LINKS"

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School-Age
"LINKS"
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Services

#### A Systematic Approach to Creating Solid Partnerships with Parents

By Roberta L. Newman

The evidence indicates that meaningful parental involvement is one of the most powerful predictors of high student achievement and healthy development. At the same time, it is no secret that achieving strong parental involvement can be a difficult challenge. Sometimes, even our best efforts seem to lack sustainability. We find ourselves asking, "If we know parent involvement is important, why do we often fall short in our efforts to create strong partnerships between parents and programs?"

Current research not only uncovers the beneficial outcomes of parent involvement, but also reveals that strong parental involvement is usually the result of a systematic approach. The more the relationship between parents, educators, and child care professionals approaches a comprehensive, well-planned partnership, the higher the student achievement. When parents receive frequent and effective communication from a school or program, their involvement increases, their overall evaluation of the program improves, and their attitudes toward the program are more positive. These findings hold the key to successful parent involvement for two important reasons.

- They stress the importance of communication and building relationships with parents as a foundation for parent involvement.
- They stress the importance of developing and using a comprehensive, systematic approach to building relationships, which leads to strong parent involvement.

By focusing on these two key points, we can create a climate that encourages and supports successful parent involvement.

#### The Four "A's" of Parent Involvement: Acceptance, Assessment, Accommodation, and Alliance Building

Four "A's" of Parent Involvement can provide us with a framework for developing a systematic approach to building relationships with parents and increasing parent involvement.



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1. Acceptance. Parents, like children, have different ideas, values. knowledge, concerns, lifestyles, plans, pressures. dreams, resources, and constraints. Educators and child professionals who are successful in building positive relationships by recognizing accepting parents as the most important people in children's lives, regardless of differences among them. The attitudes and opinions we have about parents have a strong effect on our ability to interact effectively with them. It is important to identify and acknowledge our feelings and opinions about parents of children we serve and to discuss how these feelings can either help or hinder our work with families.

For example, staff who are convinced that parents just want to drop children off and forget about them are not likely to make efforts to get parents involved. They've already decided parents aren't interested. On the other hand, staff who believe parents are a valuable resource for program planning are likely to solicit parents' suggestions, ideas, and concerns as they plan program experiences.

Because we're all human, parents, educators, and child and youth care professionals all have values, beliefs, concerns, and traditions that influence our attitudes and shape the way we look at each other. The first step to building relationships with parents, then, is to acknowledge our own attitudes towards parents

and explore ways to work through those attitudes that may be preventing us from accepting parents as valuable partners.



2. Assessment. The one unifying theme among today's parents may be that many of them are stressed by the challenges of meeting their obligations in the workplace, while trying to build and maintain healthy relationships with the significant people in their personal lives. The extent to which parents feel that their lives are manageable and under some degree of control has a strong influence on the extent to which they are able and willing to be resourceful partners with their children's school and child care programs.

In order to get parents involved in our programs, we need to assess who they are and what they need. We need to view each family's circumstances fairly. This can be very challenging. Sometimes it is tempting to make judgments about parents based on very brief interactions with them, especially when these interactions are unpleasant or frustrating. When our observations do not provide enough information, we need to step back and ask ourselves what else we need to know in order to connect with parents in a positive way. Here are some useful questions to ask:

\*If I were a parent with a child in this program, what would I want to know? What would be the best way for me to learn about the program?

\*What individual and group interests and needs are common to many parents in our community?

\*What tension, stresses, problems, pressures, or constraints face many parents in our community?

How much time do most parents in our community have to be involved in their children's out-ofschool experiences?

\*What special knowledge, talents, and abilities do parents in our community possess? How can we make it easy for them to share/contribute their talents?

\*What's the best way for us to learn about the needs, interests, and concerns of parents in our program?

- 3. Accommodation. Gauging parents' needs, interests, and concerns reveals that parents are as diverse as their children. Parent involvement is most successful when programs accommodate that diversity and recognize that all parents do not have to be involved in the same way. Rather, programs should offer a variety of opportunities for parent involvement, including opportunities to:
- \*Talk with program staff.
- \*Receive information and learn about the program.
- \*Help shape program policies.
- \*Help support program activities.
- \*Participate in projects and

activities at the program.

\*Follow up on program projects and activities at home.

\*Get to know other parents and children.

Network with other parents with similar problems and concerns.

Parent involvement can be catching! Parents who become enthusiastically involved in one opportunity frequently expand their involvement to other opportunities.

4. Alliance Building. Several years ago I noticed this sign in a poster shop: "To know nothing, is to imagine everything." It struck me that we as educators child and youth professionals often put parents in position of "imagining everything." Unless we make a conscious, comprehensive effort to let parents know what's going on, parents must depend on their children to fill in the blanks themselves. Some parents imagine everything is wonderful when it really isn't. Other parents are nervous about what they don't know. Based on very little information, parents may develop a negative impression about the quality of their child's education and the care their children are receiving.

Genuine, two-way communication with parents is the key to alliance building. I have found it helpful to think in terms of three basic steps that lead to strong alliances with parents.

#### Share Information:

Set up formal ways for parents to learn about daily and weekly

happenings. Provide both thorough orientation materials and ongoing information about program events and activities.

Remember that sharing information implies a two-way exchange. Use a variety of formats, including conferences, surveys, discussion groups, and group meetings.

Share information about each child's experience in the program, taking the time to share good news when children learn a new skill, solve a hard problem, make beautiful, something say something funny, or have an especially happy or productive Let parents know about day. children's developing likes. dislikes, and interests.



#### Communicate Regularly

Communication experts tell us that the more we talk to one another, the more positive our attitude toward communicating becomes. Brief exchanges between teachers, child care staff and parents help build friendly, open relationships. Whenever possible, warm good-byes greetings and help children parents and feel comfortable, valued, and important.

In addition to informal chats, plan opportunities for parents to get to know you and other families in the program through social events, children's performances or assisting with field trips or special projects.

Share Problems Effectively

One of the reasons we need to take the time to build relationships and share information with parents is that positive relationships with informed parents help us build trust and confidence in each other. parents While are often understandably apprehensive about discussing problems, they don't want to be kept in the dark. By cultivating and practicing good communication skills we can share problems or concerns with parents while still building a strong alliance with them.

Share problems at the right time and in the right place. Plan thoughtfully and set up a private meeting or private phone call.

problem-sharing Start a conversation by offering some positive comments first, if at all Remember what Haim possible. Ginott said in his book Teacher and Child, "When a teacher talks to parents about their children, he intrudes on family inevitably dreams." End your meeting with positive comments, too, if at all possible.



Monitor the reactions of parents. As you talk with parents about problems, be aware of body language and other signals that a parent may be feeling tense, hurt, disappointed, or angry.



Ask questions, get advice, and invite parents to work with you. Remember that parents know their children better than anyone else. Find out if they have the same perspective and expectations of their children as you do. Work toward agreeing on strategies and solutions to solve the problem.

Stress consistency among home, school, and other programs. Try innovative approaches to reaching out to parents. For example, design a "Family Friendly" Poster, inviting parents to share information about their children.

Listen. When you solicit comments and suggestions from parents, be sure you really listen to what they have to say. genuinely open to hearing ideas and opinions. Take time to hear parents out. Assume you can learn something from them. Don't interrupt. Don't rush. Be willing to accept feelings even if they're different from your own. Check your perceptions of parents' feelings and opinions by restating what you have understood them to say.

Trust parents' abilities to find

solutions to problems.

## The Changing Definitions of Family

As we work to build strong relationships with parents and families, it is critical to recognize that traditional definitions of the roles of parents have changed significantly, and continue to change in today's complex world. As educators and child and youth care professionals, we must remember that efforts to build relationships with parents should be inclusive of all those who may be fulfilling the role of parent in the lives of children. While many children in our schools and programs may live in traditionally defined two-parent families, many others may live in single parent homes or live with a grandparent, an older sibling, an aunt or uncle, an adoptive parent, a foster parent, or someone else who is assuming the parental role. Our overarching goal should be to reach out and make positive connections with whoever is fulfilling the parental roles) in the lives of the children we are educating and guiding. Working together, educators, child and youth care professionals and parents can build lasting and sustaining relationships to benefit each child in meaningful ways.



#### Illustration I

Theme and Text for a Family Friendly Poster

Create a "Family Friendly" Poster for your program, using the text and suggestions below. Have children decorate the poster to make it attractive. Place the poster near the entrance of your program where parents can see it daily.

WE HAVE A COMMITMENT TO FAMILY FRIENDLY SERVICE.....
To Keep Our Commitment We Need Your Help Throughout the Year!

HELP US STAY IN TUNE WITH YOUR NEEDS AND INTER-ESTS.....

\*Tell us about your day when you pick up your child.

\*Help us learn about your child's special talents and strengths.

\*Tell us when your child needs extra help or support.

\*Keep us informed about any important changes we need to know about to serve you well.

\*Let us know about your family and cultural traditions.

\*Make suggestions when you think we could serve you better.

\*Ask us questions if you don't understand our policies and procedures.

\*Tell us the best ways for you to connect with your child's experience in the program.

VISIT WHENEVER YOU CAN -YOU ARE ALWAYS WELCOME!

We want to build positive relationships with all our families....Help us achieve this goal!

#### By Kathy Hermes

We attend lots of workshops and have great ideas for the program. Our program is organized by grade level and we have an activity period each day. It seems like there are so many interests that it's hard to come up with something that everyone enjoys doing. We have great ideas, but sometimes we are afraid to try something new. When we find an activity that works we do it often until everyone is tired of it. It's easy to get stuck in a rut, especially for long-time staff. Some children in our program have been coming for up to five years, and they seem to expect something new every day. We need an infusion of excitement. We're running out of ideas fast!



As you know, children have lots of ideas about what would be fun to do in a school age care program. They are one of your greatest resources. The best way to find out what children like to do is to ask them. It can be scary, though, because after they tell you, they will know that you are listening and will expect to do some of them. A

good way to start is to have everyone make a list of three things they would like to do. First, have them make the list. Allow them to think of creative ways to communicate their interests, such as doing a commercial or performing a rap. They can work together in small groups, or alone, depending on their interests. Allow a good deal of time for the group to be creative. When the children present their ideas, write them down on a large piece of paper so they know you are listening. Then you can have them help you figure out to do some of the activities through the vear.

If many of the children have been in the program for a long time, it is likely that they know each other very well. Also, the older children get, the more varied their interests are. Are you able to organize the groups by interest, at least some of the time? Can you set up the program so that each child chooses an activity group for a period of time every day? When you organize a group based on a common interest, kids are more likely to be engaged and excited about the activity. It is a good option for staff, too, as each staff person has activities that they really enjoy. Offer staff a chance to bring a special interest or hobby to the program and teach it. For instance, if someone knits, have a knitting group on a certain day each week. Anyone is welcome to participate (with maximum group limits established). Some programs call these clubs. The object is to make a wide variety of activities available to meet the wide range of ages and interests you likely have in your program.

#### **Mixed Abilities**

Children of all grades will be at many learning levels. This makes the group interesting, but it also presents a challenge. Many activities can be used with younger or older children if you adapt them. You need to know your group and their abilities and interests to adapt any activity.

Ability &

isn't just an age concern. Some children may have physical, mental or emotional disabilities that would require activities be adapted to meet their needs. If you think the activity might be too difficult, talk with the child who might be challenged to participate. Ask the child if he or she can do the activity or if help might be needed. Unless the disability is due to a recent accident, the child has been living with it for a long time and

knows what he can do and when help is needed. When a child has a physical disability and says that he or she can't play a particular game, there is still a place for that child in the activity. How can you change the way the game is played so the child can participate at their level, even if only for a short time? The child could be the score keeper, etc. Whatever you decide, make sure no one is singled out. Suggest that two children work together as a scorekeeping team. Talk with the family of a child whose abilities are limited. Ask their suggestions for adapting activities that can include all children.

#### Adapting the Activity

Working with children in groups, you will always have a range of skill. That doesn't mean you can't use activities that are more advanced than some of the children. Plan ahead of time and adapt the activity so that everyone can participate at their level.

To increase the level of an activity, you can have older children,

Read directions out loud Read books about the subject

Use the Internet to find out about related topics

Help younger children with cutting and fine motor skills

Arrange a display of completed projects

Meet with other older children and come up with related activity ideas

To decrease the level of an activity, younger children can,

Work more closely with an adult or helper on fine motor activities

Do the activity at their own pace, their own level, taking extra time as needed

Complete part of the project, according to their ability and skills

When you organize activities that children want to do and adapt them so that everyone can be successful, children and staff will be more likely to enjoy trying new activity ideas. Mix it up and let children organize themselves by interests. Allow older and younger children to work together. The result is a rich learning environment that teaches children about cooperation, patience, mentoring and sharing special interests.



#### Child Care Specialist Certificate

Every person seeking a Specialist Certificate will participate in three unique types of training for a total of 60 hours: Child Development (20 hours), Specialist Training (20 hours), and Professional Development (20 hours). The Specialist Training consists of 20 hours in one of the specialty areas described below. This training is available after 20 hours of Child Development training is completed. You may earn a certificate in one of four specialty areas. Upon completion of the 60 hours in the Specialist Certificate you are eligible to receive six (6) CEUs.

- Infant/Toddler addresses children birth-three years.
- Preschool addresses children age three-five years.
- School-age addresses children age 6-13 years.
- Family Day Care addresses children of multiple age groups cared for in a licensed family day care home.

An individual training plan of 20 hours of Professional Development will be developed with each participant in order to complete the Specialist Certificate.

Visit http://chs.astate.edu to view training opportunities in your area!

## **Cooperative Games**

## **Cooperative Games**

Every provider dreams of a program where all children experience joy and fun. We would love for children to treat each other respectfully and work in cooperation rather than in competition with one another. Ultimately we want to create a environment where safe children know one anall other and feel accepted. This dream can become a reality if you focus on building a community at your program that is based on these values. Here are a couple of games and activities that you can do with children to help demonstrate some of these values and hopefully move you in the right direction towards building a healthy schoolage program!

#### A What

Ages: 8 and up
Group Size: 5-20
Supplies Needed: Random objects (i.e. fork, shoe, pen, etc.)

Have the group sit in a circle. One person takes an object and hands it to the per-

son on her/his left saying, "This is a duck" (the object should be something that is not a duck, such as a sock). The person receiving the object then says, "A what?". The first person then responds, "A duck," then turning to the person on his/her left, "This is a duck." The conversation repeats itself again and so on. As the "duck" reaches the third person, the first person takes a new object and begins again. This continues until all of the objects have gone around the circle or everybody become too confused and giggle.

#### **Find Your Type**

Supplies Needed: Sets of 3x5 index cards with matching animals, enough for each person to have a card

Have all participants spread out and give them each a card with an animal on it. Tell them they can not speak and they are not to show it to anyone. Tell them to find their mate by doing something that the animal would do. Start everybody at the same time. The game is over when all mates are found!

#### **Toilet Paper Game**

Group Size: 10 or more Supplies Needed: two rolls of toilet paper

This game can be done in a circle as a group, or in two teams, depending on the group and group size. Once everyone is in a circle or two single-file lines, the game can begin. The person at the head of the line or at one point in the circle holds the end of the roll while the roll is unrolled going over the head of each person in the line without breaking. When the roll reaches the end of the line, or the starting point of the circle, it must be passed back, this time going through

everyone's legs, again without breaking. If at any point the roll breaks into two or more pieces, the roll must be passed to the head of the line or

starting point of the circle and the team must begin the whole process again. This can be done as a race against the clock or between two or more teams.



## **Cooperative Games (Continued)**

#### **Quiet Concentration**

**Group Size:** 15 or more **Supplies Needed:** None

Players sit on the floor in a The chosen first circle. player gets up and touches something in the room. The touches second player whatever the first player touched, then touches something different. continues until all have had a turn. If the children start to forget, the other children help by pointing to the object without talking.

#### I'm Looking For...

<u>Supplies Needed:</u> Enough chairs for everyone playing minus one

Group sits in a circle of chairs with one person standing in the middle (no empty chairs). The person in the middle says, "I am looking for anyone who was...born in Arkansas!" Anyone who was, including the person who is asking the question, must get up and run across the circle to find a new seat. You cannot take

the seat of the person next to There will be one vou! person left in the middle who will ask the next auestion. Possibilities of questions to ask include: places traveled. wears glasses, likes chocolate ice cream. plays a musical instrument, etc. The game is when over the group chooses to end!



#### Pick-Up Cups

Group Size: 4 or more

**Space** Needed: Enough space for groups of 4 to 9 to sit in a circle on the floor or around a table

<u>Supplies</u>: Paper cups (6 or more per group of 6), rubber bands, string

This game works best with small groups of 5-7 people

but can be done with as few as 3 and as many as 9. Before playing this game, the rubber bands and string need to be prepared. Once the number of small groups and number of people in group has been determined, cut one 9-10" piece of string for each person, tying one end to the rubber band so that each small group will have one rubber band with as many stings tied to it as there are people in the small group. Place the cups rim with as many strings tied to it as there are people in the small group. Place the cups rim down and separated within playing the space. Depending on the age of the group, challenge the group to stack the cups or build pyramids. No one may touch rubber band. the anyone else or the cups, and each person has to hold their end of the string. With each person pulling and relaxing their strings, the group can expand the rubber band enough to pick up the cups and move them. Challenge the group to complete the task without talking.

## **Cooperative Games (Continued)**

#### Rock, Paper, Scissors

Group Size: Each person must have a partner Supplies Needed: None

Rock, Paper, Scissors is a game for two players typically played using the players' hands. The two players each make a fist with one hand and hold the other open, palm upward. Together, they tap their fists in the open palms once, twice, and on the third time form one of three items: a rock (keep hand in a fist), a sheet of paper (holding hand flat, palm down), or a pair of scissors (extending the first two fingers and holding them apart).

The winner of that round depends on the items formed. If the same item is formed, it's a tie. If a rock and scissors are formed, the rock wins (rock smashes scissors). If scissors and paper are formed, scissors win (scissors cut paper). Finally, if paper and rock are formed, the paper wins (paper can cover a rock). After round one completed, another is begun. Play continues until one player reaches a predetermined score or whenever the players' boredom is alleviated.

#### Morph

Group Size: The more the merrier!

Supplies Needed: None

Teach children the basic game of "Rock, Paper, Scissors". Everyone starts as an egg and assumes the physical position described below. Everyone finds another egg to play the game Rock, Paper, Scissors As they play with another person, they will only play one round with a person at their same level of evolution. If they win, they evolve into another thing at the next level (Ex. Eggs become chickens, chickens become dinosaurs, etc.) If they lose, they are bumped down to the previous level. If you lose as an egg, you stay an egg. The levels of evolution (in order) are:

 Egg (start with your arms over your head and lace your fingers together like

- you are hidden inside an egg)
- Chicken (Flap your arms and walk like a funky chicken!)
- Dinosaur (Extend your arms in front of you with your fingers acting as claws and make fierce dinosaur sounds)
- Ninja (Perform karate moves without touching anybody)
- Super Hero (Pretend like you are flying around town as a Super Hero)

Once you become a superhero you cannot lose that status and you fly around until the game ends. The game ends whenever the leader chooses.

## Useful Resource Everyone Wins! Cooperative Games and Activities

150 cooperative games and activities, designed to help children resolve conflict, enhance communication, build self-esteem, be creative, and have fun. Each game is developmentally graded and indexed according to appropriate age level, activity level, and group size.

Materials and props are always simple and inexpensive.

## "If you want a puppy, start out asking for a horse."

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Though it may have taken me a while to get this one, it gives me a chuckle to think how cleverly I used this as a youngster. As we attempt to provide quality service at an affordable cost, we frequently find ourselves scrounging around for resources to run our programs. So it doesn't matter whether you're writing a grant, begging a school board or sponsor, dealing with a facilities contractor or developing new partnerships...remember to first think BIG!

I've never met any human being that always gets what he or she wants the first try. To continue working at it until one sees satisfactory results is the ultimate commitment. Winners think like winners. They see victory in ordinary accomplishments. When you start out with an optimistic vision, often the unanticipated outcomes are even richer than what you initially sought.



# "If your dog doesn't like someone, you probably shouldn't either."

Simply put...trust your instincts. You didn't get to be a director without having good judgment and common sense. Use it.

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Some smart six-year-old must have learned at a very tender age that acting with integrity is the only way to function. It is doubtful that the youngster ever heard the word integrity when he or she made this poignant remark, but the axiom certainly hits at the heart of workplace ethics. Integrity goes well beyond honesty. At any level of the workplace, integrity involves how you treat others even when they are not present. betraying confi-Belittling, dences, criticizing and gossiping about others behind their backs are activities that erode trust in

your organization. Not only should you avoid these types of communications, but also you should not permit others to engage in them either. Treat colleagues, children and parents with respect and expect them to reciprocate with each other. Integrity involves doing what is right without thinking about it, even when no one is looking. Showing integrity builds trust. Lack of integrity can undermine all other efforts.

"Keep banging until someone opens the door."

Never let go of the tenacity of your youth. Encourage lifelong learning. Take a class. Keep a journal. Write an article. Share ideas. Resist the urge to give up on that grant proposal or business partnership that isn't quite fruitful. Whenever we face a tough task or distasteful activity, our first challenge is convincing ourselves that we can do it. Our second challenge is deciding whether it is worth the effort. Take advantage of your own resourcefulness and initiative. Make persistence a way of life.

## Kids Wisdom 101 (Continued)

Since I am an avid fisherman, I really appreciate this one. Simply this...happiness is in the activity, not necessarily the outcome. The fact is I do catch a lot of fish. But I honestly can not recall the last time I actually kept one. It is the process of

fishing that I enjoy. I delight in the fresh air, the trees, the steady

chorus of birds and the solitude of nature's abundance. It is a break from the demands. stresses and deadlines of the real world. You need not be a naturalist to get the point. What is really important is that you delight in what you are doing and take pride in your work. The leader has an obligation to let others see him or her genuinely enjoying the program. To some parents, staff and children, a satisfied leader is more comforting than a knowledgeable one. Others will mirror your attitude.

This more fun to color with outside the lines and with there's no good reason with why clothes have to with match."

Care center directors were probably among the first to understand and exploit this philosophy into adulthood. As we observe them engaged in two common activities children unknowingly provide us with some astounding clear advice. Celebrate differences and rejoice in being unique.

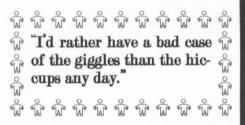
Start by doing simple things like brightening up your work environment with something that makes you and those around you feel good. Don't concern yourself with appearances. If a polka dot potted plant can spread this philosophy, as well as, a smile...then put one on

your desk or at the center's entrance. Have a Show Your Own

Style Day or an Appreciate Me Week.

People bring their own passions, needs and feelings to school or the workplace in the same way they arrive with different skills. Know that their passions and feelings could be different from yours. Provide activities and outlets to support such differences and show sensitivity to the needs of others.

Another helpful interpretation of this childlike philosophy is to avoid the "We've always done it that way" mentality. Examine some of your habits and rituals. A willingness to change even a few of them can pay enormous dividends in the quality of your program. Obviously, it is important to choose carefully. Target for change those habits and rituals that create stress or interfere with the productivity and happiness of those who work and play in the program.



Laughter is one of the most important activities that any human being can do to help both themselves and those around him or her. A daily dose of humor is a good way to ward off stress and keep spirits high.

## School-Age Pre-Employment Training

This training was developed especially for part-time staff members or employees new to school-age care. The workshop will focus on providing tools and techniques for building an age-appropriate classroom, creating school-age activities, and learning and understanding what constitutes a quality school-age program.

#### **Arkadelphia**

Community Enrichment Center Tuesday, February 7, 2006 6:00-9:00 PM

#### Beebe

ASU Beebe Student Center Monday, November 28, 2005 6:00-9:00 PM

#### **Jonesboro**

ASU Childhood Services Tuesday, December 6, 2005 6:00-9:00 PM

#### **North Little Rock**

First United Methodist Church 6701 JFK Blvd. Thursday, February 9, 2006 6:00-9:00 PM

#### Coming Soon!

School-Age Specialist Modules will SOON be available ONLINE!

Look for them in January 2006!



### Statewide School-Age Care Conference

Saturday, November 12, 2005

Little Rock Arkansas 4-H Conference Center 9:00AM-2:00PM

Call 1-888-429-1585

## School-Age Regional Workshops

Cabot

"Spectacular School-Age Science" United Methodist Church Gym Thursday, January 19, 2006 6:00-9:00 PM

**Fayetteville** 

"Spectacular School-Age Science" Donald Reynolds Boys & Girls Club Thursday, January 26, 2006 6:00-9:00 PM

**Fort Smith** 

"Spectacular School-Age Science" and "Cooperative Games" Public Schools Service Center Saturday, January 28, 2006 9:00AM-1:00PM

**Bentonville** 

"Why Don't They Listen to Me?" High School Football Stadium Conference Room Thursday, April 27, 2006 6:00-9:00 PM

Call 1-888-429-1585 to register!